IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (previously presented)   A method for digital data gathering in response to a query, comprising:

conducting searching of a physical data warehouse containing structured and unstructured data sources,

preselecting data sources most likely to contain a valid response to the query before submitting the query to the data sources, and

combining results from said structured and unstructured data source searches and sorting the results to provide a direct answer.

2-4 (cancelled)

5. (currently amended)   A method of digital data gathering for providing an a direct answer to a natural language question, comprising:

a) accepting input of a natural language question;

b) identifying the relevant concepts of the natural language question;

c) assembling the relevant concepts of the natural language question into a query;

d) identifying a data source in a physical data warehouse likely to contain an answer to the query;

e) performing a first search of the query in the physical data warehouse;

f) performing a second search of the query in an unstructured data source not contained in the physical data warehouse;

g) integrating the results of the first and second searches and selecting a direct answer to the natural language question; and

h) displaying the direct answer to the natural language question.

6. (cancelled)

7. (original)   The method of digital data gathering for providing an answer to a natural language question, according to Claim 5, further comprising: eliminating redundant search results and ranking search results in order of relevance.

8. (previously presented)   The method of digital data gathering for providing an answer to a natural language question, according to Claim 5, further comprising: routing the query and identified data source to a structured data source manager.

9. (cancelled)

10. (previously presented)   The method of digital data gathering for providing an answer to a natural language question, according to Claim 5, further comprising: identifying the data source in the physical data warehouse via a meta-data source for the physical data warehouse.

11. (original)   The method of digital data gathering for providing an answer to a natural language question, according to Claim 5, further comprising: eliminating irrelevant words of the natural language question from use in the query.

12. (previously presented)   The method of digital data gathering for providing an answer to a natural language question, according to Claim 5, further comprising: routing the query to an unstructured data source manager for performing the second search.

13. (previously presented)   The method of digital data gathering for providing an answer to a natural language question, according to Claim 5, further comprising: displaying data related to the direct answer.

14. (previously presented)   The method of digital data gathering for providing an answer to a natural language question, according to Claim 5, further comprising: accumulating search results for a specified time before displaying the direct answer.

15. (original)   The method of digital data gathering for providing an answer to a natural language question, according to Claim 5, further comprising: accumulating additional search results after displaying the direct answer.

16. (original)   The method of digital data gathering for providing an answer to a natural language question, according to Claim 15, further comprising: updating the ranking of the search results by incorporating the additional search results.

17. (original)   The method of digital data gathering for providing an answer to a natural language question, according to Claim 16, further comprising: providing a second display updating the ranking of the search results by incorporating the additional search results.

18. (original)   The method of digital data gathering for providing an answer to a natural language question, according to Claim 17, wherein: the second display updating the ranking of the search results is manually actuated.

19. (currently amended)   An intranet mediator for providing a direct answer to a natural language question, comprising:

a) a user interface with:

i) a natural language question input module for accepting natural language questions; and

ii) an answer module for display of the ~~most likely~~ direct answer;

b) a parser module for identifying the relevant concepts of the natural language question, assembling the relevant concepts of the natural language question into a query and eliminating irrelevant words of the natural language question from use in the query;

c) an unstructured data source manager for managing query input to, and accepting results from, unstructured data sources outside of a physical data warehouse;

d) a data source selection module for accepting the query from the parser and for identifying a data source likely to contain an answer to the query; the data source selection module being connectable to a meta-data source for a physical data warehouse,

e) a dispatcher module for accepting the query from the parser and for accepting the identified data source from the data source selection module and routing the query and identified data source to a physical data warehouse data source manager or the unstructured data source manager, or both;

f) the physical data warehouse data source manager being for accepting the query from the dispatcher and performing a search of the query in the physical data warehouse and forwarding the results of the search to a results manager module;

g) the unstructured data source manager further accepting the query and any identified unstructured data sources from the dispatcher and performing a search of the query in the identified unstructured data sources outside of the physical data warehouse and forwarding the results of the search to a results manager; and

h) a results manager module for accepting the results of the structured and unstructured data source searches and integrating the results of the searches and selecting the direct answer and forwarding the direct answer to the answer module.

20. (previously presented)   The intranet mediator according to Claim 19, further comprising: the natural language question input module being constructed and arranged for allowing the user to manually select data sources if desired.

21. (previously presented)   The intranet mediator according to Claim 19, further comprising: the answer module being constructed and arranged for display of the direct answer and data associated therewith.

22. (previously presented)   In the intranet mediator according to Claim 21, the results manager module further comprising: means for accumulating search results for a specified time or specified number of results before displaying the direct answer.

23. (previously presented)   In the intranet mediator according to Claim 21, the results manager module further comprising: means for accumulating additional search results after displaying the direct answer.

24. (previously presented)   In the intranet mediator according to Claim 23, the results manager module further comprising: means for updating the ranking of the search results by incorporating the additional search results.

25. (previously presented)   In the intranet mediator according to Claim 24, the answer module further comprising: means for providing a second display updating the ranking of the search results by incorporating the additional search results.

26. (currently amended)   The In the intranet mediator according to Claim 25, further comprising: means for manually actuating the second display.

27. (previously presented)   An intranet mediator for providing a direct answer to a natural language question, comprising:

a) a physical data warehouse containing structured data sources;

b) unstructured data sources outside of the physical data warehouse;

c) a meta-data repository having meta-data for the structured data sources;

d) a natural language question input module for accepting natural language queries and allowing the user to manually select data sources if desired;

e) a parser module for identifying the relevant concepts of the natural language question, assembling the relevant concepts of the natural language question into primary query tokens and eliminating irrelevant words of the natural language question from use as primary query tokens, and for accepting results from a query expander module;

f) a query expander module for accepting the primary query, determining analogous terms to the primary query tokens, and forwarding the primary query tokens and the analogous terms to an unstructured data source manager, and assembling enhanced query tokens from the results;

g) an unstructured data source manager for managing enhanced query token input to, and accepting search results from, the unstructured data sources outside of the physical data warehouse;

h) a data source selection module for accepting the enhanced query from the parser module and connectable to the meta-data source for the physical data warehouse, and for identifying a data source likely to contain an answer to each of the enhanced query tokens;

i) a dispatcher module for accepting the enhanced query tokens from the parser and for accepting the identified data sources from the data source selection module and routing the enhanced query tokens and identified data sources to a structured data source manager and an unstructured data source manager;

j) a structured source manager for accepting the enhanced query tokens and the identified structured data sources from the dispatcher and performing a search of the

enhanced query tokens in the identified structured sources and forwarding the results of the search to a results manager module;

k) the unstructured source manager further accepting the enhanced query tokens and identified unstructured data sources from the dispatcher and performing a search of the enhanced query tokens in the identified unstructured data sources and forwarding the results of the search to a results manager;

l) a results manager module for accepting the results of the structured and unstructured data source searches for each enhanced query token and integrating the results of the searches and selecting a direct answer to the natural language question and forwarding the direct answer to the answer module; and

m) an answer module for display of the direct answer and associated data links.

28. (previously presented)   The intranet mediator according to Claim 27, further comprising: the meta-data repository having meta-data for unstructured data sources within the physical data warehouse.

29. (cancelled)

30. (previously presented)   A method for digital data gathering in response to a query, comprising:

combining structured data sources into a physical data warehouse with a meta-data repository,

conducting a search of at least one data source within the physical data warehouse, and

sorting results of the at least one data source search and providing a direct answer to the query.

31. (previously presented)   The method according to Claim 30 further including conducting a search of unstructured data sources outside of the physical data warehouse if a direct answer is not selected from the physical data warehouse search.

32. (previously presented)   The method according to Claim 1 further including conducting a search of unstructured data sources outside of the physical data warehouse if a direct answer is not selected from the physical data warehouse search.

33. (currently amended)   The method according to Claim ~~30~~31 further including conducting a search of an unstructured data source outside of the physical data warehouse and combining and sorting the results of the unstructured data source search with the results of the physical data warehouse search.

34. (previously presented)   The method according to Claim 1 further including conducting a search of an unstructured data source outside of the physical data warehouse and combining and sorting the results of the unstructured data source search with the results of the physical data warehouse search.

35. (previously presented)   The method according to Claim 33 wherein the selection of the direct answer is weighted to the search results from the data warehouse.

36. (previously presented)   The method according to Claim 34 wherein the selection of the direct answer is weighted to the search results from the data warehouse.